

AQA RIZA 'ALI RIZA- RIZA-I-ABBASI

By M. ABDULLA CHAGHTAI

THAT great orientalist, Sir Thomas Arnold, wrote about Riza-i-Abbasi, round whom much controversy has already raged: "Before anything like a complete history of Persian Art can be written much work will have to be done by the art critic and by the historian. From Persian Literature must be collected all the scanty references to artists and their paintings. Unfortunately, during the greatest period of Persian Art, the painter had no Vasari, and consequently, material for the biography of the earlier masters is almost entirely lacking, and when chroniclers began to find a place for them they added to the enumeration of scholars, poets, doctors, and calligraphists in any particular reign, some account of painters also, the details provided are very meagre and include no description of individual paintings or characteristics of style ... Though Aqa Riza received rewards and favours from his patron Shah Abbas, he was constantly in trouble and poverty in consequence of his evil habits. To this need of money may possibly be attributed the large output of Riza Abbasi ..."¹

Of course, it is a fact that oriental historians have devoted but little attention to this particular need of recording the biographies of the artists, as has been pointed above by Arnold. We find, however, that from day to day new material is being discovered by scholars, of which a good deal much has already been published. No one knew that one day European scholars would so eagerly study the Eastern painters, and that the Western connoisseur would appreciate their masterpieces so much. In this respect the East owes much to the West.

The problem of Riza-i-Abbasi is not a new one. Several writers have devoted to it not only ordinary notices and articles but also books; nevertheless, the problem is still an open one, as has already been pointed out by Dr. Kühnel.² B. Dorn devoted in 1852 his attention to this artist, and later on, in 1873, the same scholar revised his former opinion by saying that Ali Riza-i-Abbasi was only a calligraphist, not both miniaturist and calligraphist as he had expressed before.³ After him Drs. Sarre-

1. *Burlington Magazine*, No. CCXV, 1913.

2. Kühnel, E. *Die Miniaturmalerei im Islamischen Orient*, Berlin, 1923, pp. 36-38.

3. B. Dorn, *Catalogue des MSS et Xylographes Orientaux*, p. 291, and *Melanges Asiatique*, 1873, Vol. IV, pp. 97, 103.

Mittwoch and Karabacek wrote books on the same topic¹ and came both to different conclusions. Sarre-Mittwoch said that Ali Riza played the rôle of a calligraphist and painter at the court of Shah Abbas; and Karabacek analysed the question "Ali Riza-i-Abbasi the calligraphist, Riza-i-Abbasi the painter," and found more than seven painters and calligraphists called Riza with slight variations. Similarly, other scholars went on adding useful material and arrived at different results. Last, I find that Mr. Nicholas N. Martinovitch did his best to solve the problem.² Most of these scholars depended upon the extant specimens of work, and very few tried to look into the contemporary records. An exception are two great scholars: Arnold, as quoted above, and M. Blochet; but it is surprising that both hold different opinions. The former thinks that we have here only with one person to do, while the latter advises us not to confound Aqa Riza with Riza-i-Abbasi.³

With new material, now available, I shall endeavour to prove that the names, Aqa Riza, Ali Riza, and Riza-i-Abbasi, relate to three different persons and not (as some scholars hold) to one.

AQA RIZA

IN HIS great work *A'lam Arai Abbasi*, Iskandar Munshi, the court historian of Shah Abbas (1581–1628), furnishes us with chapters on Calligraphists, Miniaturists, and Musicians of his time. In the chapter on Miniaturists he writes: "Maulana Ali Asghar of Kashan was an incomparable master and an accomplished painter, as an artist and colourist he was unique and surpassed his contemporaries in drawings of streets and trees. He also took service with Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, and in the time of Ismail Mirza was on the staff of the Library. His son Aqa Riza became the marvel of the age in the art of painting and unequalled in these days. In spite of the delicacy of his touch, he was so uncultured that he constantly engaged in athletic practices and wrestling, and became infatuated with such habits. He avoided the society of men of talents and gave himself up to the association with such low persons. At the present time he has repented such idle frivolity a little, but he pays very little attention to his art, and like Sadiq Beg he has become ill-tempered, peevish and unsocial. In the service of his present Majesty, the Shadow of God, he has been the recipient of favours and considerations, but on account of his evil ways he has not taken warning, and consequently he is always poor and in distress."⁴

It was Mr. Percy Brown who first of all claimed, (in the light of the

1. Sarre-Mittwoch and Karabacek, *Riza-i-Abbasi ein Persischer Miniaturmaler*, Vienna, 1910, 1911.

2. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, April 1935.

3. *Les Peintures des MSS Orientaux*, Paris, 1914–1920, pp. 81, 289, 299, 3.

4. *Catalogue of Persian MSS*, Bibliothèque Nationale, *Persane Suppl.* Paris, No. 1348 Fol. 133a.

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Emperor Jahangir's Memoirs) that Aqa Riza and Riza-i-Abbasi were two different persons.¹ Here was the chance for Sir Thomas Arnold to change his original opinion; but in 1929, when he wrote his other great work, *The Islamic Book*, in collaboration with Prof. Grohmann, he again reiterated his former views.²

We read in the Memoirs of Jahangir that Aqa Riza came to India and entered his service: "On this day Abul-Hasan the painter, who has been honoured with the title of *Nadīr-uz-Zaman*, drew a picture of my accession as the frontispiece to the *Jahangir-Nama*, and brought it to me. As it was worthy of all praise, he received endless favours. His work was perfect and his picture is one of the masterpieces of the age. At this time he has no rival or equal. It at this day the master Abdul-Hayy and Behzad were alive they would have done him justice. His father, Aqa Riza of Herat, entered my service at the time when I was prince. He (Abul-Hasan) was a *Khanazad* of my court. There is, however, no comparison between his work and that of his father (*i.e.*, he is far better than his father). One cannot put them into the same category. I have brought him up from his earliest years to the present time. I have always looked after him, till his art reached its present level. Truly he has become a *Nadīr-uz-Zaman* (the wonder of the age). Also *Ustad* Mansur has become such a master in painting that he has received the title of *Nadīr-ul-Asr*; in the art of drawing he is unique in his generation."³

In *A'lam Arai Abbasi* and Jahangir's Memoirs we find the genealogy of this great artist, thus: Ali Asghar—Aqa Riza—Abul Hasan. Ali Asghar, the father of Aqa Riza, served under Sultan Ibrahim, the brother of Sultan Ismail Safawi II (1577). When the latter ascended the throne of Persia, Ali Asghar entered his service and ranked with such seniors as Aqa Mirak, Sultan Muhammad, Muhammadi, etc. It is easy, therefore, to infer that Aqa Riza was of an advanced age when he entered India. I am fully aware that Iskandar Munshi does not mention the fact of Aqa Riza having been to India, but such an omission carries no weight. Many facts, now known to have happened, have often been omitted by oriental historians. For instance, we know that Jahangir sent his court painter Bishandas to Persia in the company of Khan-i-Alam.⁴ But we do not find any mention of this fact in the writings of the contemporary Persian historians.

I have discovered on the main gateway of the Khusrau Garden, Allahabad, the following inscription in perfect *Nasta'liq* style:

1. Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals*, London, 1924, pp. 65–82.

2. Sir Thomas Arnold, *The Islamic Book*, 1929, pp. 82–83.

3. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangir* (Jahangir's Memoirs), English Translation, Vol. II, p. 20.

4. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangir*, Aligarh Edition, p. 285.

5. Khusrau was the eldest son of Jahangir from Shah Begam, who was the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das. She died in 1012 A.H. The building known as *Khusrau Bagh*, where Khusrau himself was later on buried in 1021, was built by Jahangir's orders under the supervision of Aqa Riza *Musawwar*. Mr.



Portrait of a Mystic by Agha Riza



Portal of the Masjid-i-Shah at Isfahan
(Reproduced from the *Illustrated News*, London, January 10, 1931)



Portrait of a Youth Reading by Riza-i-Abbasi
after Muhammadi of Herat
(British Museum)

حسب الحكم حضرت شاهنشاهی جهانپهای ظل الهی نور الدین محمد جهانگیر بادشاه
غازی باهتام مرید اخلاص آقا رضا مصور این بنائی عالی صورت اتمام رفت

which clearly shows that this grand edifice was erected under the supervision of Aqa Riza *Musawwar* (painter), by the orders of Jahangir, while the inscriptions of the monument were inscribed by the great calligraphist Abdulla *Mushkin Qalam*. This clearly shows that Aqa Riza was a painter and not a calligraphist, for had he been a calligraphist, he and not Abdulla *Mushkin Qalam* would have executed the inscriptions. Moreover, I reproduce here an outline-painting of an Indian mystic¹, bearing the signature of Aqa Riza on the corner of the robe near the leg. One can easily compare his signature with the other extant specimens.

The best specimens of his work were first reproduced by Marteau-Vever in *Miniature Persane*, e.g., plate No. 17, and later on published by other writers on Persian Art. This picture has calligraphic specimens both on the top and bottom in fine *Nasta'liq* style from the pen of Mir Ali *al-Katib*, who died in 937 A.H. (1530 A.C.), about a hundred years before Aqa Riza. This artifice of placing calligraphy-specimens on top or bottom (or both) of a painting belonging to another period is not uncommon, and one has to be very careful when attempting to date both the specimen and the painting or ascribing both to the same master. Another instance of such misleading practice is also manifest from plate No. 18—a miniature of a young Persian prince reclining on a sofa with an open book in his hand with *Naskhi* calligraphy on its top and bottom.² On reading one finds that the calligraphed pieces are headings of two chapters—"Power" and "The Manifest Sign"—of the Quran (which have no connection whatever with the painting itself).

In the British Museum there is an illustrated MS. of *Anwar-i-Suhayli*³, the best specimen of the early days of Jahangir's reign, although it has some signed and dated paintings of the last years of Akbar's reign, among them some which bear the name of Aqa Riza. The colophon of the MS. bears the date 1019 A.H. (1610 A.C.). The signatures are not in his usual style, and show little variation of his name, such as Aqa Riza, Aqa Muhammad Riza and Muhammad Riza, together with the appella-

Beveridge wrote notes on this garden with the transcription of the inscriptions found there, but the inscription bearing Aqa Riza's name on the gateway escaped his notice, (vide *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1907, 1908, 1909).

1. This unique specimen of Aqa Riza's work is reproduced with kind permission of Khan Bahadur Abdur Rahman Chughtai, artist, Lahore, from his collection.

2. Marteau-Vever, *Les Miniature Persanes*, 1913, plates 17-18. When M. Saksian reproduced the one of them in his *La Miniature Persane* (Fig. 162), he omitted the writings, probably considering them irrelevant.

3. British Museum Catalogue of Persian MSS. Add. 18579.

tion *Murid*, *Murid-i-Padshahi*, or *Murid beh Ikhlas*. In my opinion the names of the painters which appear on the miniatures of this MS. are not actually by those artists themselves; rather they have been added by some other calligraphist, as all are in the same style. The MS. is, no doubt, partly illustrated by Aqa Riza and his son Abul-Hasan, along with other artists of the court. Apart from it, another important work of Aqa Riza bearing similar characteristics has recently been brought to light by M. Godard and has been reproduced and explained by him in *Athar-e-Iran*¹ under the heading *Les Marges du Murakka Gulshan à Tehran*. One of the margins bears an inscription in four lines:-

شاه سلیم
غلام به اخلاص
آقا رضا مصور

فی تاریخ رمضان ۱۰۰۸ هـ

"Shah Salim, servant with sincerity, Aqa Riza *Musawwar*, in the month of Ramazan, 1008 A.H. (1599 A.C.)". M. Godard is mistaken in assuming that the portrayed personality (with a big beard), wearing the robes of a saint, is Jahangir the Emperor; in reality it represents the famous saint Salim Shah Chishti who lies buried in the courtyard of the grand mosque of Fatehpur Sikri.

From the version of *A'lam Arai Abbasi* and the Memoirs of Jahangir we can easily conclude that word *Aqa* was a part of the painter's name and not a title, otherwise it would have been mentioned there as such, as in the case of his son Abul-Hasan who received the title of *Nadir-uz-Zaman*².

ALI RIZA

FROM THE CHAPTER on Calligraphists contained in the previously mentioned *A'lam Arai Abbasi* of Iskandar Munshi, just two pages preceding the account of Aqa Riza *Musawwar*, we find a mention of Maulana Ali Riza of Tabrez as a pupil of Maulana Ali Beg, the great calligraphist. "... During the reign of Shah Abbas, Maulana Ali Riza had a great inclination towards the practice of *Nasta'liq* style, and made within a short period great progress. In this art he became very famous and unique in his age."³ Tahir Nasirabadi speaks in his *Tazkirah* of poets

1. *Le Athar-i-Eran*, Paris 1936 The same *Murakka* was also exhibited at the Persian Art Exhibition, London, 1931.

2. Memoirs of Jahangir, English Translation, Vol. II, p. 20.

3. Catalogue of Persian MSS. B.N. Paris Suppl. 1348, Fol. 131a

of this Ali Riza as a poet and calligraphist.¹ Ali Riza wrote the inscriptions on the walls of the mosques of Lutf-Allah and Jami' in Isfahan. These inscriptions, in the best style of *Naskh*, are still *in situ*. The one (reproduced here),² on the portal of the Jami' at Isfahan contains the words ۱۰۲۵ هـ کتبہ علی رضا عباسی (Ali Riza-i-Abbasi wrote it in 1025 A.H.). Again we find mention of the same Ali Riza-i-Abbasi simply as a calligraphist in *Mir'at-i-Alam* of Bakhtawar Khan.³ But a long account of his career as a calligraphist is found in *Imtihan-ul-Fudhala* by Mirza-yi-Sanglakh, in which his mastery over *Naskh* and *Nasta'liq* is fully discussed.⁴ We can confidently say that the word *Abbasi* is an appellation showing that he was in the service of Shah Abbas I, as we gather from *A'lam Arai Abbasi*. Besides these, the best specimens of his calligraphy are to be found in the Bodleian Library (dated 1011 A.H.), in the British Museum (dated 1022 A.H.), and in other various collections. They all bear the name of *Ali Riza-i-Abbasi*.⁵

RIZA-I-ABBASI

RIZA-I-ABBASI the painter, whose style of signing and dating his work is familiar to all, receives the following notice from Sir Thomas Arnold: "From the sixteenth century onwards the practice of signing pictures became more common, though it may with some assurance be asserted that the majority of Persian paintings, even after that period, lack signatures of the artists. To this modesty or self-suppression, the enigmatical personality of Riza-i-Abbasi presents a notable exception; this artist was particularly fond of signing his name on his drawings and not only does he give his name, but sometimes also the date and the circumstances in which he made the picture."⁶

Recently Miss Isabel Hubbard has tried to prove that Ali Riza-i-Abbasi the calligraphist and the painter were one and the same person.⁷ She has based her conclusions on the illustrated and illuminated MS. of *Subhat-ul-Abrar* of Maulana Jami' from the Kevorkian Collection of America, whose colophon (prepared in 1022 A.H. at Sari) runs thus:—

تمام شد کتاب افصح الفصحاء مولانا جامی علیہ الرحمۃ کاتبہ ومصورہ ومذہبہ علی رضائی

1. Catalogue of Persian MSS. British Museum Add. 7087. Fol. 182b

2. *The Illustrated News*, London. 10th Jan., 1931, containing Mr. Pope's note on the mosque of Isfahan with a fine illustration.

3. *Oriental College Magazine*, Lahore, August 1934. The extract concerning calligraphists has been published by Prof. Muhammad Shafi.

4. Mirzai-i-Sanglakh, *Imtihan-ul-Fudhala*, long ago published in Persia.

5. Catalogue of Persian MSS., Bodleian Library, Oxford. Ouseley 173, fol. 27b.

6. Sir Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, p. 71, and *Persian Miniature Painting* by Binyon, Wilkinson and Basil Gray, 1933, p. 157.

7. *Ars Islamica*, Michigan, 1937. Vol. IV, pp. 282-8.

عباسی وقع الفراغ منها فی بلدة ساری من سنه هزار و دو

In my opinion (I have not seen the original MS.) there is a vast difference between the decoration and calligraphy of the first two pages and that of the last one bearing the colophon reproduced therein. Miss Hubbard has not said anything regarding the authenticity of the last page of the MS., and has simply based her conclusions on the bare words of the colophon, which are not consistent with the usual way in the colophons are written by the actual calligraphists of the MSS. As regards the paintings of this MS., which are surely of some later date, a friend of mine wrote to me from London: "Judging from them I would say that the miniatures are of a later date than given, and may well be of the early 19th century. All we know is that they existed in 1856."¹

It is a fact that Riza-i-Abbasi's work is distinctly different from that of Aqa Riza, Aqa Mirak, etc. His style clearly bears a Western influence. Unfortunately, no genuine record throwing any light on his life is so far forthcoming; the only historical material consists in his own works which are dated between 1025 -1044 A.H. If Ali Riza, the calligraphist noted above, had been a painter as well, Iskandar Munshi would have probably mentioned in his *A'lam Arai Abbasi*, either under the Calligraphists or Miniaturists, that he was a calligraphist as well as a painter. So far no authentic document is forthcoming to prove that he was both. A chronological list of his works could be prepared, and from many notes attached to his miniatures interesting facts could be gathered for the history of his time. I jot down some of his works:

- (a) The portrait of Hakim Shamsa Muhammad Hafiz-Allah, dated 1042.²
- (b) The portrait of Darwesh Abdul-Muttalib Hamdani, dated 1041.³
- (c) The portrait of Darwesh Abdul Malik Astrabadi, dated 1041.⁴
- (d) The portrait of Muhammad Mughith, the great Astronomer.⁵

There exist three portraits of Riza-i-Abbasi the painter by his pupil Mu'in *Musawwar*, made on different occasions and at the request of different persons, as we learn from the inscriptions which they bear; they are all dated between 1084—1087 A.H.⁶ The main difference in each of them lies in the treatment of the face, especially the eyes, the turban, and the subject of the drawing on which Riza is at work. otherwise the

1. Letter dated Dec. 18th 1937, from a friend in the Drawing and Print Department of British Museum, London.

2. F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India, and Turkey*, 1913, plates 158—160, and Kuhnel's work quoted above, plate 78.

3. *Ibid*

4. *Ibid*.

5. *Ibid*

6. Martin, p. 68, from Bernard Quaritch's Collection; Binyon etc., p. 178 and item 374, pl. CXII and Mr. Ajit Ghos's Collection, Calcutta. *Modern Review*, Jan., 1926, p. 44. Only the first two are transcribed here

man being portrayed is the same; this shows that Mu'in vividly remembered the features of his late master who, according to one of the inscriptions, had died in 1044 A.H. (1634 A.C.). Two out of the three inscriptions are as follows:

(1) (From Bernard Quaritch's Collection) -

شیه غفران و رضوان آرامگاهی مرحوم و مغفور استادم رضا مصور عباسی مشهور به
رضا عباسی اشهر بتاريخ شهر شوال باقبال ۱۰۴۴ و این شیه بعد از ۴۰ سال در
۴ دهم شهر رمضان المبارک ۱۰۸۷ حسب فرموده فرزندی محمد نصیرا باتمام رسانید -

معین مصور عفی عنه

(2) (From Engle-Gros Collection, Pennsylvanian Museum, Philadelphia)—

شیه مرحمت و مغفرت بناهی مرحوم جنت مکان استادم رضا مصور عباسی
علیه الرحمة والغفران بتاريخ ۱۰۴۴ ۱۰۸۷ بیاد کار بجهد مرقع باتمام رسید
مبارک باد مشقه معین مصور غفرالله ذنوبه

The first shows that it was made by the order of Muhammad Nasira in 1084; the other was made for an album in 1087. Moreover, from both inscriptions we can safely infer that the appellation *Abbasi* was neither Riza-i-Abbasi's title nor had it any relation to Shah Abbas; had this been the case, his pupil would have almost certainly mentioned it in these inscriptions, as it was usual on such occasions to record all names and titles of the portrayed person. It should also be noted that the same appellation *Abbasi* was used by his son Shafi.¹

Who was the direct teacher of Riza-i-Abbasi, or the main source of his inspiration? It is just possible that the great artists like Behzad, Sultan Muhammad, Mirak, etc., were his spiritual predecessors. But I find that the work of Muhammadi, one of these senior artists, was of particular importance for him. One of Muhammadi's genuine and dated specimens of work is found in the Museum of Louvre, Paris,² and another, the portrait of some chief, in the British Museum, London.³ It bears the following inscription by Riza-i-Abbasi:

این صورت کار استاد محمدی هراتی علیه الرحمة و المغفرة

حسب الامر نواب کامیاب اشرف اقدس اعلى خلد الله ملكه ابدًا - فقير احقر العباد -
حیره کشودم وبهر اشرف مشرف و مزین کردید - رقم کمینه رضا عباسی

1. *Ibid.*, See p. 442, n. 1.

2. Louvre Museum, Paris, No. 20.

3. British Museum, London, C. 123.

It clearly shows that it was originally the work of *Ustad* Muhammadi and was later on made or copied by Riza-i-Abbasi by order of the person portrayed. A similar inscription by Riza-i-Abbasi is to be found on a study of Behzad, but here Riza has clearly written that this was the work of Behzad and that he himself had nothing to do with it.

"But Riza-i-Abbasi was capable of better work than the average of the typical drawings, with which he is generally credited, would suggest. Even if—on stylistic grounds—one excepts some of the examples which Dr. Sarre's closely reasoned study ascribes to him, he is revealed as a born draughtsman of marked originality and a new realistic power, whose ingenious pencil delighted in seizing on the types of common people whom he met on his walks, and recording them in rapid economical strokes. His linear patterns sometimes have a seductive, undulating rhythm, as in the pairs of lovers with arms intertwined."¹ Some of the persons whom he portrayed are noted above.

"It has been observed that the handwriting of the inscriptions on some of the Riza-i-Abbasi drawings is identical (or almost so) with that of a certain Shafi Abbasi who according to a remark on a drawing dated 1634, was a son of Riza-i-Abbasi and it is possible that he copied his father's work, passed it off as his own, and added detailed remarks to strengthen his pretensions."²

In the light of these facts we can safely assume that Aqa Riza, Ali Riza and Riza-i-Abbasi are three different persons, not one. This projected Unity is really a Trinity.

SOME OTHER ARTISTS NAMED RIZA

FROM DIFFERENT sources I have been able to collect the following few artists, both calligraphists and miniaturists, whose names, with little variations, are also Riza:

- (a) Muhammad Riza Tabrezi (specimen of work dated 1099 A.H.).³
- (b) Ghulam Riza.⁴
- (c) Agha Riza.⁵
- (d) Muhammad Riza.⁶
- (e) Riza (specimen of work dated 1007).⁷

1. Binyon etc., p. 157 *Zeichnungen von Riza Abbasi*. Many of the drawings in Dr. Sarre's album are unsigned, and in Binyon etc., items Nos. 314, 318. Blocher's *Musulman Painting*, plate 168, a colour reproduction one of Shafi Abbasi's studies.

2. *Ibid*

3. Marteau-Vever bearing a page of the transcriptions of the signatures of the artists.

4. *Ibid*.

5. Karabacek as quoted above.

6. *Ibid*.

7. B. N. Paris Suppl. Persian.

- (f) Ali Riza son of Hasan Ali Khan; wrote the *Shahnama*.¹
- (g) Ali Riza of Isfahan (died in 981 A.H.).²
- (h) Riza Faryabi.³
- (i) Muhammad Riza Mashhadi, a pupil of Mir Sayyad Ahmad Mashhadi.⁴
- (j) Muhammad Riza Imami of Isfahan (specimen of work dated 1070 A.H.).⁵

1. Burlington Magazine. Vol. XXII, P. 111.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Martin.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Schulz, *Die Persisch-Islamische Miniaturmalerei*, Leipzig, 1914. (Appendix containing the list of artists etc.)

